DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 341 279 FL 020 049

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TITLE Pitfalls of Cross-Cultural Communication Training: The Art of the Appropriate.
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 15p.; In: Communication and Discourse across Cultures and Languages. AFinLa Yearbook 1991; see FL 020 041.
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cross Cultural Studies; Cultural Awareness; *Finnish; Foreign Countries; *Intercultural Communication; Interpersonal Competence; *Second Language Instruction; *Sociolinguistics; Stereotypes; Uncommonly Taught Languages
IDENTIFIERS Finland

ABSTRACT

Issues emanating from a workshop, "Broadening the Mind or Reduced Personality: Skills for Increasing Cross-Cultural Awareness," held at the 1990 Jyvaskyla Seminar on Cross-Cultural Communication are discussed. The issues relate to problems that arise when Finnish educators attempt to incorporate training in cross-cultural communication into foreign language teaching curricula. Areas discussed include sociocultural factors, national stereotypes and interpretation of others through such stereotype, the Finnish national stereotype, teaching rules of politeness, questions about whose norms to follow, the role of language as power, confidence, and cross-cultural communication training in general. It is concluded that as Finland undergoes a rapid program of internationalization, Finnish foreign language professionals must be able to negotiate power roles on cross-cultural encounters. Contains 16 references. (LB)

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PITFALLS OF CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION TRAINING: THE ART OF THE APPROPRIATE

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It is in the failure to achieve integration ... that personalities too often make shipwreck, either breaking down (physically or mentally) under the strain of conflict or abandoning any real desire for an effective synthesis. (Charles E. Raven, *The Creator Spirit*)

Introduction

This article addresses certain issues emanating from the workshop 'Broadening the Mind or Reduced Personality: Skills for Increasing Cross-cultural Awareness' held at the 1990 Jyväskylä Seminar on Cross-cultural Communication. These issues relate to problems which arise when educators attempt to incorporate training in cross-cultural communication into foreign language teaching curricula.

Most of the participants in the workshop had professional interests in the teaching of languages for specific purposes. As such, the interests here lie more specifically with those educators involved in the training of Finnish native-speakers who work in various professional fields which necessitate communication with people from other cultures and speech communities.

The path which leads to the training of foreign language learners in the field of cross-cultural communication is long and winding and sometimes fraught with danger. This paper attempts to consider some of the key pitfalls facing those interested in cross-cultural communication. It also points to some of the safe ground where training can be embedded into language and communications curricula with relative ease.

FL 020 049

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Socio-cultural factors and situation

Over the past few decades, research on the role of socio-cultural background knowledge in human interaction has been approached from various disciplines, and, thus, studied from numerous angles. The comparatively recent surge of general interest in the field of sociolinguistics has also contributed to a change of orientation. Linguistics, the study of the way in which language works, had traditionally distanced itself from the way in which 'language is used'. In arguing that the systematic study and interpretation of language sometimes needs a broader framework than that offered by linguistics, Halliday comments: "Linguistics (was) the study of linguistics rather than the study of language" (Halliday 1977:19).

The considerable interest in sociolinguistics over the last few decades has now led to a broadening of the basis of language study. In terms of language and culture, it has shifted away from descriptions of speech communities and their communicative repertoires, which can often be found in anthropological, sociological and psychological approaches. Rather, it has become oriented towards the role of socio-cultural knowledge in individual language use, found, as it is, in specific speech events. This has led to a focus on the interactive process and, finally, on the interpretive procedures followed by different people in human communication.

This focus marks an important change of emphasis within linguistic research on the area because approaches towards the study of language and culture became increasingly integrated. In 1982, Gumperz noted that instead of describing what rules or cultural knowledge can potentially affect communication, we should look at how these phenomena are brought into the communicative process. Thus, the focus of research in this area would be on the interplay of both socio-cultural and linguistic knowledge in communicative situations. The crucial point here is that the social environment is no longer to be seen as static and governed by set systems of rules and norms but is seen as dynamic and subject to constant change.

National stereotypes

The social environment, henceforth called the situation, is the bedrock of most enquiry into facets of cross-cultural communication. If we accept the premise that a reserved and taciturn person found in one situation may become an extrovert and prolific talker in another, then we should be extremely cautious about falling into one notable pitfall in this area, namely the personification of national character.

Attempts to personify national character can swiftly lead to the development of national stereotype. This is seen to act in two fundamental ways in human communication. Firstly, it can facilitate a person's perception of how s/he might expect to understand people who are not from his/her own background. Secondly, it may provide a person with a stereotyped self-image, cast under the guise of national identity, which s/he actively projects during cross-cultural encounters.

These two basic examples of how national stereotyping is used in human communication are of great significance in any discussion on training in cross-cultural communication. Thus, they deserve some exemplification.

Interpretation of others through national stereotype

In order to reinforce notions of a national stereotype, one may attempt to 'quasi-personify' a national character and provide it with certain specifiable types of behaviour. Thus, the stereotype becomes somehow legitimised and more accessible an image for people in general.

This is done on many levels in contemporary Western societies. The mass media is a particularly powerful agent in this respect. Advertising, type-casting and news portrayal may all focus on specific types of behaviour and communication, which are used to build and reinforce the image of the national stereotype. Words themselves may evolve in such a way as to be associated with carrying some vestige of national character. Take for example the Arabic word *Tabaghdada* ('to behave like one from Baghdad') meaning 'to swagger', or 'to throw one's weight around'. Is this the result of past Arab

experience with Iraqi (or Baghdad) national character, does it reflect a pan-Arab historical perspective towards Iraqi social and economic history, or is there an alternative explanation?

Is it stereotyping which enables the English language to acquire *bolshy* (from Bolshevik) meaning someone who behaves in a bad-tempered or difficult and rebellious way? Another example which is no longer found in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is its previous definition of *Malay* as synonymous with 'lazy'.

Stereotyping also operates at government level. The British Prime Minister recently formalised the process of national stereotyping. In July 1990 various experts from education, industry and government were invited to a seminar on German re-unification. The 'Chequers Summit' reportedly embarked on seeking an answer to the question of describing the national character of the Germans. A seminar report, subsequently leaked to the British press, revealed that the German persona was characterised by *angst*, *aggression* and *arrogance*.

In response to this report, a national British newspaper (*Sunday Times*) invited a group of eminent Germans to provide a critique of the British national character. The discussion resulted in the words *decent*, *tenacious*, *fun* and *fair* being attributed to the British.

Attempts like these to outline national character are fundamentally flawed. Essentially, we can argue that national character does indeed exist in the minds of some people. However, its usefulness in cross-cultural communication training may be questioned because of its over-simplified grouping together of personality and culture. The question of where personality begins and culture ends, or alternatively, where culture ends and personality begins, must be faced when training in this area.

Characteristics of human behaviour as qualities found to be typical of a particular person or situation may not be usefully extended to describe the behaviour of those who originate from one nation-state or another. For every stereotype found in a nation-state there will be an iconoclast. If we characterize something we give it qualities by which it can be easily recognised. Shared environmental conditions, cultural traditions and institutions provide intrinsic

qualities which are altogether different to personified qualities such as the above-quoted aggression and decency.

The usefulness of pursuing national character may therefore be a somewhat futile exercise. When it occurs, it often leads to a 'Seek and ye shall find' self-fulfilling prophecy. In cross-cultural encounters communicative behaviour may be orientated towards locating those signs which can be interpreted as supporting the stereotype. When we stereotype a person, we form a fixed image of them which leads to expectations that they will behave in a certain way which encourages an equally rigid interpretation of their patterns of communication.

To attempt to teach cross-cultural communication through reference to national stereotypes is thus Catch-22. Even with the very best of intentions, attempts to broaden cultural horizons through discussing national stereotypes is likely to be self-defeating, for it inevitably leads to a myopic and blinkered view of other nationals. Yet, when we examine some textbooks and curricula, this is precisely what has happened.

Portraying self as national stereotype

Another way, in which national stereotyping functions, is to provide an identifiable image which is projected by a person in cross-cultural interaction. Here the subject projects what s/he considers to be his/her own national stereotype and then seeks to fulfil it. So, for example, a person may engage in a form of role play, for a variety of reasons, which projects a national image. However the extent to which this second function is generalisable across cultures is problematic.

Finnish national stereotype

If we accept that in cross-cultural interaction the Finn him/herself may lean towards projecting a negative autostereotype (Lehtonen 1990), then we should consider the other side of the coin, namely, what, if any, is the national stereotype associated with Finnish men and women?

In responding to this question, it is perhaps relevant to ask a counter-question: "Is there a national stereotype of the Finn?" which can be said to be held in other speech communities.

In attempting to answer this we can return to Lehtonen (1990), who notes "The idea that people all over the world (have) some specific image of the Finns is a narcissitic one: In reality most foreigners know very little about Finland and have even fewer stereotypical expectations about the Finn's special characteristics".

Donner (1989) observes: "A recurring problem in small countries, including Finland, relates to whether they have a good or a bad reputation in the surrounding world. That a country might have no reputation at all, good or bad, in some parts of the globe or is almost completely unknown ... is something that rarely seems to occur to those who talk about the matter."

Both Lehtonen and Donner suggest that the outsider's view of the Finn is likely to be largely unformed. Thus, we may consider that in cross-cultural encounters, the Finnish image is tabula rasa, largely free of pre-conceived notions. This offers the teacher of intercultural behaviour in Finland an unusual and special set of circumstances.

Crucially, the notion of Finnish tabula rasa should encourage a shift away from discussing so-called Finnish behaviour, because its usefulness in the interpretation of cross-cultural communication, in relation to outsiders views of Finns, appears to be limited. In other words, there is little point in painting a possibly fictious national stereotype of a Finn, if (a) national stereotypes are compilations of cliches and, (b) there does not appear to be a widespread stereotype of the Finn in Europe or beyond.

To dwell on the subject of 'Me suomalaiset' (We Finns) in cross-cultural training would consequently appear to be of little value. In itself,however, this statement raises the question "What is of value in cross-cultural communication training?"

Cross-cultural training goals in Finland

In preface to this section, it is perhaps useful to turn attention back to a long-standing problem in education, namely, prescriptivism vErsus descriptivism. This debate offers another pitfall. Fellow trainers and language learners are sometimes equally affected by it. Thus, it merits some attention.

Teaching rules of politeness

It is sometimes assumed that there are fixed rules of language use which should be known about when using a foreign language in cross-cultural encounters. This is frequently an erroneous view. Politeness phenomena, for example, are not something that can be readily criteria-based. There are general features which affect how something is communicated at a given point in time, such as power, social distance, sex, the strength of an imposition, etc. However, any attempt to teach rules of behaviour as criteria assumes a prescriptive approach and is highly problematic unless one has a clear view of the situation for which such teaching is aimed.

But, as indicated above, the use of the word *situation* here automatically assumes the inclusion of a host of social variables. Many of these cannot even be predicted prior to experiencing a given communicative s tuation.

"Whose norms do we follow?"

Work on cross-cultural communication inevitably leac's to questions of power and ideology. A prescriptive approach also raises the c,uestion of "Whose rules do we follow?" when using a foreign language. Does the teacher of the English language attempt to impose Anglo Saxon standards on the Finnish language learner or the teacher of German, rules emanating from Bavaria? Clearly not, for the language learner is not being taught cross-cultural communication in order that s/he slips into an English 'persona' when he uses the language to communicate with foreigners, be they native or non-native speakers of English. The main argument against such a proposition is indicated above, when we argue that the English persona *per se* rarely exists.

In addition, there is the problem of assuming that attempting to communicate with a native-speaker of a foreign language according to his/her socio-cultural conventions somehow involves showing deference. The key issue here may relate to our understanding of the word *deference*. Any attempt to consciously attempt to cooperate in communication with others, whether by largely adapting to their rules of communication or creating an amalgam of different cultural norms, shows deference, that is, respect. What needs to be borne in mind in this respect is that such display of deference should not be viewed as a one-way process, eg. that when a Finn uses English with an English-speaking native-speaker s/he has to adapt to an 'English' way of communicating.

The problem relates to perceiving acts of deference as an acknowledgement of inferiority of status. The reasons why such an attitude has been seen by trainers in this field is probably due to a misunderstanding of the concept of deference in addition to low self-image in respect to other selected cultures (see Lehtonen 1990).

Deference is one means of showing politeness and thus is shown in encounters where participants exhibit a desire to cooperate to some extent. It is a matter of showing respect and regard for someone else's opinions and wishes and functions in many ways and should not be seen as equated with 'submitting to a foreign culture'. As far as English is concerned, we have to acknowledge that as an international language it belongs to each person who uses it, be they one of the estimated 300 million native-speakers or 400 million non-native speakers said to use it regularly as a means of communication.

A suitable answer to the question posed above is: each individual language learner chooses which norms, and adaptations of norms, s/he wishes at a given time and place. There is a variety of norms which exist and when you learn a language like English we cannot assume that there exists one set of norms which can be learnt and followed. If a person wishes to be perceived as being a certain type of person in a particular situation, then interpersonal skills are required. Across cultural boundaries these skills include cross-cultural awareness. If the language learner is in cross-cultural encounters which take place in a foreign language, then the learner's existing interpersonal skills and a degree of cross-cultural awareness must be supplemented with the ability to use foreign language conversational tools. Examples of these are gambits and

other forms of strategic language use (see House & Edmondson 1981) Thus we have the raison d'etre of cross-cultural communication.

Language as power

One goal in cross-cultural training is to broaden the ability of the language learner to adapt to the communicative demands of situations of varying interpersonal complexity as s/he wishes. Such situations include communication which is predominantly oriented towards transfer of information, because, to different degrees, all such communication is embedded in the need to develop and maintain social relationships. Thus we can say that there is no such thing as purely interactional talk. For example, some people have been said to hold the view that smalltalk (that is, talk about unimportant matters) is "rubbish-talk" which, thus, implies that it is of little value. Such a view denies the use of smalltalk as a conversational tool which may be of great significance in interpersonal communication, even that which is oriented towards the transfer of information (see, for instance, Schneider 1988). Friedlaender (1922) succinctly sums this point up: "All of us affect to despise it, and all of us (except a few intolerable burdens on society who refuse to say anything unless they have something to say) use it."

Conversational tools such as smalltalk and gambits give the language learner more power in cross-cultural communication and provide the means for greater adaptability to the demands of situations involving human communication. For instance, a person who finds himself in an unequal power situation may wish to have the tools at hand to re-negotiate the power roles that he finds there. A non-native speaker of a language may have considerable difficulty in achieving such negotiation without adequate conversational means.

Power relations are an integral part of much human interaction. The ability to adapt can be viewed as one type of power. One problem with speaking a foreign language is that a person may consider that they occupy the middle ground in certain types of interaction (notably with native-speakers) and thus become a type of reduced personality when using it for communication (see Harder 1980). The ability to handle conversational tools, an aim of cross-cultural

training, helps the language learner avoid such inadequacy. In Finland, such training also bears relevance to questions of self-confidence.

Confidence

Communicative effectiveness across cultures is not solely a matter of knowing the rudiments of a language, but includes using it appropriately. It is concern about appropriacy which may be one factor which adversely affects Finnish language learners' confidence in using a foreign language (see Lehtonen 1990; Daun, Mattlar & Alanen 1989). Training in cross-cultural communication inevitably focuses on the language learner's perception of self. The question raised previously of where personality begins and culture ends is highly problematic when we examine communicative performance. In teaching this area, we have a responsibility towards the language learner as an individual, not as a member of a class, or as a Finn. It is assumed that by providing tools for enhancing communicative effectiveness and raising the language learner's consciousness towards communication, we may boost levels of self-confidence. To reinforce the reasons for holding this assumption we can turn to evidence (see, for instance, Thomas 1983) that whereas grammatical errors may reveal the speaker to be less than proficient as a foreign language user, pragmatic errors (eg. mishandling rules of appropriacy) reflects on him/her as a person.

Miller and Grant (1978) report on research which examines how the general prediction that a future event is likely to be negative increases stress and anxiety. In terms of using a foreign language when feeling uncomfortable about one's ability to use it - a common problem cited by Finnish native-speakers learning foreign languages - one might usefully consider reduced levels of confidence as creating what Seelye (1978) refers to as 'cultural fatigue'. In other words, the language learner, because of a history of reduced confidence, resigns him/herself to a negative perception of his/her ability to use a foreign language like English.

The concept of cultural fatigue may be relevant to questions of teaching cross-cultural communication in Finland. It can be seen in the use of avoidance strategies reportedly used by some Finnish native-speakers, when they face situations, in which they are expected to use a foreign language. If this problem

exists as widely as may be the case, training in the use of conversational tools such as gambits may have a profound affect on giving the language learner courage to neither 'fight' nor 'flee' (after Konrad Lorenz) but engage in a form of 'benign reappraisal' (see Zimbardo & Ruch 1977). This would enable a more positive approach to whatever the problem is (an example recently cited in a personal communication is the delay a Finnish company continuously experiences over responding to communication by telefax in a foreign language. This was viewed as occurring because such responses require not merely information or expertise, which may be readily available, but crucially uncertainty of how to communicate appropriately in the foreign language). Reduction of cultural fatigue leads to increasing levels of individual mastery over events, which, in the case of lack of confidence, involves individual change.

Cross-cultural communication training

It appears that a particularly significant problem in the field of cross-cultural communication is establishing methods with which to conduct training. Throughout this brief article the word 'teaching' has been deliberately avoided and 'training' used in its place. This is because the notion of actually 'teaching' cross-cultural communication, as in giving instructions, is problematic because of various pitfalls that exist in this respect. Training helps focus attention towards learning skills and thus offers a more appropriate starting point when we consider that so much of this field is oriented towards the individual, his/her needs at a given time and place.

Teaching in this field sometimes involves transferring facts about other cultures, which may be little more than anecdotal and stereotyped comments of little value which encourage national stereotyping. These may be on the level of describing Arabs as burping to show pleasure after having eaten, the Japanese as having the most polite language in the World or young Finnish men and women being characterised by their intelligent-looking eyes (Milton 1920).

There appears to be little consensus on the optimum type of teaching materials, methodology and criteria for evaluation in this field. This is not particularly surprising as the type of materials that can be used need to be closely geared to the type of students involved in training. Cross-cultural communication is

closely linked to accelerating the process of understanding the significance of cultural differences. As yet, it does not fall neatly into any particular level of language learning proficiency.

It appears to be the case that the study of cross-cultural communication fits into advanced-level foreign language training. But rather than grafting cross-cultural communication onto courses at an advanced level, it may be preferable to incorporate it into all levels of a communicative syllabus (see, for example, Thomas (1983) on the subject of 'pragmatic fossilization'). However, one basic aspect of this training is that it is useful, some might think even necessary, that the learners (and the trainer) have a shared acceptance of the significance of cultural phenomena in certain types of communication.

Teaching materials in this area are readily available in other countries, particularly the USA and UK. However, the usefulness of such materials may sometimes be questionable. One common problem is taking materials designed for ESL immigrants into the UK or USA and trying to use them in EFL situations. Another is the attitude which permeates certain publications, that cultural communicative style is evolutionary in nature and that certain styles are more advanced than others. The methods such materials espouse may, however, be extremely useful for designing training programmes. But as discussed above, a major focus on training in this area is towards individual change. This means that whereas methodology may be imported, input should be specific to the Finnish (and/or Finland-Swedish) speech community.

Training a language learner in cross-cultural communication may usefully be focussed towards achieving 'cultural congruity' through looking at both cross-cultural enhancement (where things go particularly well) in addition to cross-cultural breakdown (usefully thought of as miscommunication). One problem has been that a trainer may focus too much on breakdown which can lead to a negative atmosphere and resulting in language leaners focusssing too heavily on avoiding cultural faux pas.

If training is to move the individual towards cultural versatility then such training must, to some extent, be tailor-made. One method for doing this is to adopt a self-reflection approach at the outset of a training programme (see Marsh & Räsänen 1990). Essentially, this draws on social learning theory and its

aims include awareness training of positive and negative perceptions of self and others with respect to cross-cultural interaction. In this respect the language learner him/herself determines possible strengths and weaknesses in his psychocultural attitudes.

Cross-cultural training necessitates a certain degree of probing a language learner's identity. Hence, in the course of training the learner may become vulnerable to some extent. This vulnerability means that there is an emotional dimension to such training which may be difficult to avoid. In order to harness this constructively, a self-reflection approach appears to be quite successful.

Conclusion

In the training of cross-cultural communication we face a range of complex problems and challenges. To refer back to Konrad Lorenz, we could indeed fight the idea of incorporating the area into language training or simply ignore its existence.

But as Finland undergoes a rapid programme of internationalization, it is evident that when using a foreign language Finnish professionals must, to as great a degree as possible, be able to negotiate power roles in cross-cultural encounters. This means that they must have the ability to take, keep and yield power when they communicate in a foreign language. One key feature of this ability lies in strategic language use.

It may be found that there are many examples of people who are, to a large extent, multicultural. That is, who are able to readily adapt both socially and psychologically across cultures. These are the people who need cross-cultural training less than those who know the rudiments of the language but are unsure about how to use them.

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